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ABSTRACT

Part of a 13-volume series designed to help Lutheran communities assess the feasibility of starting a Lutheran elementary school and to assist ongoing schools in current operation, this volume deals with the responsibility shared by parents and Lutheran schools for providing the child's education. The document begins by pointing out the need for a home school partnership, especially in the face of changes in the family structure, the role of the school, and the society. The second part of the publication defines the partnership roles of schools and parents. This part emphasizes the role of the Lutheran school as church and of the teacher as minister to the child. The parents' role is defined as that of listening to the child, participating in school activities, and becoming involved in school operations such as policy formation, curriculum development, classroom activities, and evaluation. The role of the congregation in the partnership is touched on. Both these sections of the publication contain activities that foster partnership between school and parents. A final section discusses two organized programs for home school partnership: parent teacher association and parent effectiveness training for Lutherans. (Author/JM)

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ED176393

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

PART I THE NEED FOR SCHOOL/HOME PARTNERSHIP

PART II DEFINING PARTNERSHIP ROLES OF SCHOOL AND PARENTS

PART III ORGANIZED PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL/HOME PARTNERSHIP

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PLANNING FOR LUTHERAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

EA 012 104

E12

FOREWORD

Lutheran schools in America are flourishing.

Many Lutheran communities are presently conducting feasibility studies to determine if they can have a Lutheran school for their young people. The need for materials to help Lutheran congregations conduct feasibility studies and make responsible educational decisions has become quite urgent.

Through the coordinated efforts and generous financial help of Aid Association for Lutherans, representatives of the educational offices of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have combined their efforts in the development of PLANNING FOR LUTHERAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS materials. These materials are companion to PLANNING FOR LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOLS, and PLANNING FOR LUTHERAN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS.

PLANNING FOR LUTHERAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS has been designed to help Lutheran communities assess the feasibility of a school for their young people and make plans and responsible decisions for the establishment of a school. Resource materials are intended to assist existing schools in their ongoing operation. While these materials are designed to help congregational leaders, it is advisable to consult with synodical (district or regional) leaders as you begin planning your feasibility study.

Often the principal will be the first person to read this manual. I urge the principal to know the content of this document thoroughly. The principal will order additional copies for those who will benefit from its use. The above is true also for directors of education and early childhood programs.

The work of the following writers is herewith gratefully acknowledged: Dr. Glenn Bracht, Mr. Robert Eggold, Mr. Eldor Kaiser, Mr. Donald Kell, Mr. Ellsworth Kierbs, Dr. Glenn Kraft, Mr. Kenneth Markworth, Mr. Neal Meitler, Rev. Paul Pallmeyer, Mr. Richard Sauer, Mr. Wilbur Tewes and Dr. Martin Wessler. A special word of thanks to the synodical leaders who gave counsel and encouragement in this project: Dr. Victor Constien, Mr. Glenn Moenning, Dr. Al Senske, Dr. Marlin Schultz, Mr. Donald Vetter and Mr. Donald Zimmerman. Thanks to Lois Prahlow for artwork; Jim Reigles for editing; Lois Brandt, Harriette Johnson and Florence Schoenfeldt for typing and Trip Gesch for printing. To Aid Association for Lutherans staff members: Dr. Martin Koehneke, Mr. Fred Pahl, Mr. William Selle and Mr. Donald Stoike thanks for their encouragement and counsel.

These materials are dedicated to the glory of God for the extension of Lutheran education.

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Martin F. Wessler
Project Director

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INTRODUCTION

Finding new ways of working with families and serving parents and children may well be the most important challenge for Lutheran schools in the decade ahead. Changes in the family and new functions assigned to the school call for new efforts to define the role of each. Today, as never before, it is important that parents and the school work together as partners, sharing the important responsibility of a child's education.

This document will point out the need for such a partnership, describe its nature, and make some concrete suggestions for making it work. The goal is to make partnership a reality and not just a notion to which we pay lip service.

The responsibility for developing a partnership lies with the school. Therefore, this document is prepared for boards of education, teachers, or a special committee to use in finding better ways of developing a partnership of school and home.

Several activities follow each part of the document. Activities are suggestions for developing policies and practices that foster partnership between school and parents. The activities are designed to be carried out by a group focusing on the home/school relationship.

To involve parents in a partnership with the school is a major task. It is worth doing to glorify God and for the good of His children.

PART I THE NEED FOR SCHOOL HOME PARTNERSHIP

A. INTRODUCTION

A Lutheran school is by nature a partnership. Scripture gives both parents and church the task of teaching and nurturing children as they grow into Christian maturity. In the school the responsibility of both home and church come together.

When Lutheran congregations were small and the schools were mostly one-room institutions taught by one teacher, partnership was relatively simple. In addition to schools getting larger and more complex, the family has also changed. But the basic purpose of the school as a way for the church to better serve parents and children has not changed.

The changes have made partnership more complex and difficult. Special effort is needed lest the school become a bureaucratic institution that views families only as one more problem in the process of educating children, and parents view the school as one more depersonalizing influence on the family. The need for partnership is greater than ever, even though it is more difficult to achieve.

Part one will explore some changes in family structures and in the role of the school. None of these changes are startling or new to the aware observer of Twentieth century life. This review will focus on how these changes affect the home/school relationship.

Partnership in education is not always a practical idea. Efficiency calls for each to know the assigned task and to become expert at it. According to that approach, the school should "train" the mind, the church educate the soul, and the home educate for life. If each does its part well, the child will become a well-rounded individual.

According to that logic, there is no need for partnership, but only for a clear understanding of the division of the work. But children do not learn or grow that way. Only by working as partners can home, school and church teach the whole child and help him grow "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

B. CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURES

To understand children it is important to understand their families. To most people the word "family" calls forth an image of a father, mother and two or three children all living together. Today few families in the United States fit that description. Although Lutheran families are probably changing less rapidly than families in society generally, they are changing. The school must be aware of the types of families in which its children live and be willing to accept into full partnership also those families that are different from the traditional family.

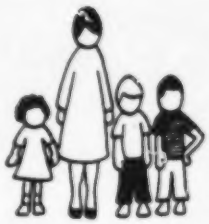
The purpose of partnership is not to bring families back to that which we consider ideal. It means working cooperatively with all families to further the best interests of the child.

There is much data that indicates that special families are becoming more ordinary. Today 25% to 30% of all children in the U.S. are being brought up by adults who are not the ones who brought them into the world. It doesn't make very good sense today to plan or conduct a school for only those families that consist of one father and mother of Germanic

background with a Lutheran heritage. At least three types of families that vary from that norm call for special mention here.

1. Single-parent Families.

One parent will very likely have major responsibility for the children after a divorce, and certainly if one parent dies. In either case there is a "presence" that remains for a long time. In the case of divorce that psychological presence is more real because the absent parent actually affects plans and may be seen from time to time. Those who work with children must be aware that parents who are no longer present in the home may have a profound effect on the dynamics of the family.



The single parent has a host of problems, beginning with lack of time and energy to keep up with the needs of the children. Add to that the feelings of loneliness, inadequacy, self-pity and guilt. The Lutheran school has a special ministry to single-parent families. The single-parent family has a double need for partnership with the school.

2. Blended Families

It is not uncommon today for two people to be remarried, each bringing children from the former marriage into the new family. A couple, having children from previous marriages, has children, adding a third set to the blend. Now there are "my children," "your children," and "our children." The relationships and dynamics of blended families become very complex and present another opportunity for special understanding and ministry by the Lutheran school.

3. Families that are Culturally/Ethnically "Different"

Ethnicity has played an important role in the development of the Lutheran churches in America. As a result each branch of Lutheranism has been a relatively homogenous "family." That is no longer true for Lutheran churches, especially not for Lutheran schools. School traditions, materials, curriculum, communications and programs should reflect the cultural/ethnic background of the community. Today racial plurality must be recognized and the variety of cultural roots affirmed. By so doing the school can help create a positive view of the family for those children in "special" families.

A new challenge is presented to Lutheran schools today because of changes in the structure of the family. It is a difficult challenge because each situation is different. There will be failure. But this cannot prevent the Lutheran school from acting as a responsible partner with the home. The school's role is to accent the positive, to prevent problems rather than to do therapy. By accepting people in all sorts of family situations, enhancing self-worth, and speaking God's forgiveness to family situations, the school can be a great help to individual children and their families.

C. THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

The role of the school is changing. Both church and parents expect a great deal from Lutheran schools today. More is demanded than merely adding the fourth R to the traditional three R's. In today's complex society it is the role of the school to include the development of attitudes and values in the educational program. Lutheran schools attempt to help children integrate their religious faith into the fabric of everyday life. This cannot be done very well in a pluralistic society unless the parents and school work together.

1. The Importance of the Individual

Education cannot be mass produced. Lutheran schools and churches have a calling to care for individuals as God does. This becomes a special calling in a computerized, impersonal society. To do an effective job of educating the whole child the school must help children achieve a sense of personal identity even though they are surrounded by a mechanical, push-button society. An awareness of family, of family roots, is an important factor in developing a sense of identity. The school needs the partnership of the home to fulfill its role of helping children develop a sense of identity.

2. School as Source of Self-worth

Self-worth has been one of the casualties of our society. Serious emotional problems among children indicate a large proportion of children suffer from a low self-image. Lutheran schools with the message of God's love for each individual are able to turn around the declining sense of worth for many children.

Bad feelings about self often originate in the home. At first glance it would seem that a school should have little to do with the home as it struggles to help a child feel good about himself. The opposite is true. The school dare not view the family as the "enemy." The school and home must work together to help the child grow in self-esteem.

D. CHANGES IN SOCIETY

A good deal has been said about how rapidly our world has been changing. Many changes in society have had a direct effect upon the family. It is important to know the key factors that have brought about the change.

1. Mobility

Many children do not have an opportunity to experience an extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins) because they have moved away from all their relatives. Many children attend several schools during the grade school years. All of this contributes to a sense of rootlessness.

2. Economic pressure

Both parents work in many families today. Some parents hold down more than one job. This means there is less time for the family to be together and, when they are, there is less energy for doing things with and for children.

3. High expectations

There is a growing belief that no one should experience pain, that life should always be comfortable and filled with pleasure. When that is not so, many people believe they should be able to take a pill or do something to change things and make life pleasant again.

4. Changing view of marriage

People expect a great deal out of marriage. When marriage isn't pleasant, many people change partners. The rate of divorce is alarming. Often children are caught in the middle. They may even become targets in the war between parents.

5. Self-oriented value system

Technology and efficiency seem to make our every want possible. People have become more turned in on themselves with too few people oriented toward serving and caring for others. This spirit has reached into the family.

In the midst of this pessimism the good news is, of course, that God's forgiveness and love also come to our world. For the sake of children growing up in this world, school and parents can join together to help children learn to cope and become loving, Christian people.

E. ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Develop a list of family service agencies and programs available in your community. Publish these resources as part of your school handbook or other publications so that it is available to all school families. Your list should include

1. Lutheran Social Service Agencies
2. City, county mental health agencies that offer family counseling or enrichment
3. Private or church-related family centers
4. Organizations such as Parents Without Partners, Alcoholics Anonymous, Alanon and others
5. Programs about parenting such as Parent Effectiveness Training

Activity 2: Consider the special needs of families in your school community, especially single-parent families and blended families. Call together a few representative parents and ask them how the school can best serve them. Be sure to consider how service can be offered without causing members of special families to feel labeled or "put down" in any way.

Activity 3: Call together parents representing the various ethnic groups that are part of your school community. Ask them to

1. Share special needs or concerns of the various ethnic subgroups
2. Review textbooks and other materials for an accurate reflection of the multicultural nature of your community
3. Establish a standing committee to work for a school that recognizes all ethnic and cultural backgrounds as gifts of God.
4. Study E11-The Role of Elementary Schools In Changing Communities. Carry out suggested activities, as appropriate.

PART II DEFINING PARTNERSHIP ROLES OF SCHOOL AND PARENTS

A. INTRODUCTION

Differing expectations get in the way of partnership. If parents expect more or something different than the school is prepared to offer (*or vice versa*) resentment is more likely to develop than partnership. Each must clearly understand its role and the role expected of the partner.

Today we cannot assume that roles are understood or accepted. Partnership requires clarification of roles and ongoing reclarification, because partnership is more complex than a simple division of tasks.

Neither can we assume that the idea of partnership is understood or accepted. Partnership is sharing common goals, accepting a responsibility for meeting goals, and sharing resources.

This section will lay out some basic functions for both parents and school. A communications system must be established to clarify expectations and to develop understandings.

B. THE SCHOOL'S ROLE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

Everyone understands that it is the school's role to teach children to read, to work with mathematics and other common subjects. It is accepted that Lutheran schools also teach religion. What is not always understood is that the school is Church and as Church it provides many services to children and their parents.

1. The School as Church

What is the "Church" in the real experience of a child? Ideally, it is the same as for adults. For adults and children alike it is helpful to view "the Church" as a verb, as something that happens as something we experience. We experience the Church in a variety of ways all of which should be part of the educational experience. We experience Church

a. as a worshipping community

b. as a "caring" or supportive community

c. as a serving community

d. as an equipping community

In a Lutheran school the pupils make up a Christian community - a community of believers. Within the context of this "community," the school is able to help parents fulfill their "nurturing" responsibilities.

a. A Worshipping Community

Children need opportunities to fully understand the worship in which they take part. Because the school brings together children at that level of maturity, it is uniquely structured to help children worship. It is true that in recent years there has been a surge of interest in helping

children feel a sense of participation in general worship services. Some congregations encourage children and young people to become involved in planning some worship services and leading the congregation in worship. This is commendable. Yet, congregational worship is often something children "put up with." For most, worship activity is still very adult. The results are that children feel left out of worship and parents become concerned.

Worship that takes place in a Lutheran school can be different. The school can provide rich opportunities for children to worship at their own level of maturity. Children can lead and plan worship that includes their needs, joys and hopes. Worship education can go beyond the school and include private and family worship at the child's level. The setting is ideal to make worship a celebration with friends for birthdays, baptism anniversaries and other special events in the lives of the children. Parents can also participate in family worship services developed with the school children as planners. The school with parents can provide meaningful worship experiences for children.

b. A Caring or Supportive Community

Christian people "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2); weep and rejoice with one another (Rom. 12:15); love one another (1 John 4:7, 8); and forgive one another freely (Col. 3:13). A child who is fortunate to have experienced the Church in these ways in the family is richly blessed. But even that child must be involved in these experiences in the larger Christian community to fully know that these are experiences of the Church, not just of the family.

The school joins the parents as a partner by providing a setting in which a supportive Christian community can be developed for children. Care and burden-bearing must be learned through experience; they are not automatic responses to baptism. The school has an opportunity to "be the Church" and develop a Christian support community for children and their families.

c. A Serving Community

Much religious education implies that children should individually be about serving God in their families and neighborhoods. But Christian parents want their children to experience the church as people banded together in Christian service (Phil. 4:9, 10, 15-17). A group of children that come together daily can join hands in Christian service in a variety of ways. The unique gifts of each child can be celebrated and made useful in meaningful ways. Children can experience the satisfaction of accomplishing larger projects together with children in other schools through district and synod-wide projects. At an early age, children learn attitudes and skills in serving the needy, the elderly, the lonely in the congregation and in the community. Almost daily, children can learn to help classmates in a variety of ways and in this way develop habits and skills so important in the Christian community. Christian parents who want this kind of experience for their children will work with the school to make it possible; again partnership develops and grows.

d. An Equipping Community

There are many skills that Christian people need to learn to help them glorify God and serve people. So the Church is a community in which people equip one another for Christian service.

Because it is easy to think of children as "not yet a part of the Church," it is easy to overlook them in the equipping process. Children need special attention and support as they develop their abilities for Christian witness and service. Many Christian parents nurture these abilities and skills in their children, but many are concerned because they feel they lack the necessary "equipping skills," and because they want their children to see this as a function of the Church and not their family only.

Teachers in Lutheran schools understand the needs and abilities of children. Through its teachers the school offers a service to parents in equipping children in the habits and skills of stewardship, witnessing, evangelism and care of the needy. In the school children learn by experience along with others of their own level of maturity. Perhaps Lutheran schools need to provide more opportunities for children to develop these habits and skills in view of the growing needs of the church and community. Lutheran teachers can help children develop their interests and abilities because they know their children and are with them throughout the year.

2. The Teacher as Minister

Teachers in Lutheran schools have a unique ministry. Their concern for children includes their academic, social, physical and spiritual well-being. The teacher's interest in the whole child extends the teacher's ministry beyond the school to the child's family.

a. The Teacher as Minister to the Child

A minister is God's representative, a person through whom God's Spirit does His work. Christian ministry requires caring for another person in the name of Jesus Christ.

Christian teachers have a special concern for the children they teach. Their concern includes the whole child. Care is expressed as a teacher speaks God's Word to the child in day-to-day real-life situations. God's Word is a word of judgement, but especially His Word of grace. The teacher lives out that word in forgiveness, hope and joy with the child.

Children have problems - about which teachers are often the first to know. The ministry often casts the teacher in the role of counselor - one who listens, who cares, who helps as appropriate.

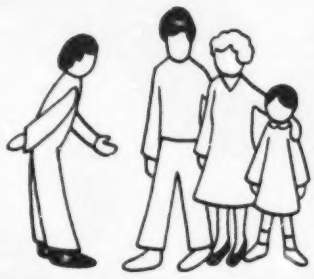
As children and teachers share joys and sorrows, they become friends. Both are children of their heavenly Father - they have much in common. This common bond makes friendship possible.

b. The Teacher as Minister to the Family

Children live in families. It is nearly impossible to be in ministry to children without being in ministry to families. In spite of the influence of media and other forces on children's lives, they are still affected more by home and school than any other influence.

The teacher's ministry to families consists of helping family members, especially parents, see themselves as within a partnership. In addition, the teacher will minister to the family in much the same way the teacher ministers to children by speaking God's Word of judgement and grace, through the ministry of listening and counseling, and by being a friend in Christ's name.

All of this begins as the teacher learns to know the family by spending time with the the family in the home and outside of it. Time for this ministry must be provided so Lutheran schools can be responsible partners with parents.



C. THE PARENTS' ROLE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SCHOOL

The school does not "take over" for the parents when a child is enrolled. This is the time that partnership begins. On the one hand partnership means that parents will have the school's help in carrying out parental responsibility. On the other hand it means that parents have the responsibility of being partners with the school. The parental role as partners involves two primary functions - one relates to day-by-day life of the child; the other relates to the support of the entire school program and operation.

1. Parents as Day-by-Day Partners

a. Enrollment Is Commitment

By enrolling a child in a Lutheran school, parents communicate to their children and to others a good deal about their values. Parents also say something to the teachers and the school; they make a commitment to be a part of a community of people who have joined together to provide Christian education for their children. To live up to that commitment may require energy, time and money. The school owes it to parents to help them understand this ongoing commitment before they enroll their child.

b. Listen to the Child

"What did you learn in school today?" can become a worn out question in a hurry; but parents need to know what is happening at school. Perhaps the question should be rephrased. Parents need to know what is happening with their child. Therefore, learning to listen is an important skill for parents. Some children "tell everything"; others don't. The skill of listening is responding to the child in such a way that he is encouraged to talk. The school can help parents develop their listening skills. The child is a good communication link between school and home.

c. Participation in School Activities

The simplest way parents can demonstrate their support for their child is participating in school activities. If there are two parents in the home,it is important that both participate. The child who feels "dumped off" at school programs, special services, family nights and the like may be deeply hurt. Children whose parents make a contribution by providing transportation for field trips, helping with athletic programs, making costumes etc. receive a rich gift from their parents.

It is the school's responsibility to provide various opportunities, different types of activities for parent participation. The school should help parents recognize the importance of their participation for the school's benefit and for their child's good.

d. The Family as a Model for Christian Life

On a day-by-day basis the school and home offer a model of what it means to live in God's kingdom.

- Participation in church life

  Whether or not a person participates actively in the church's life depends significantly on the model presented by the family while the child is growing up. It does little good to speak about the Christian community or the joy of corporate worship if a child does not experience that community joy.

- Daily life in forgiveness

  The gospel message does not stop with the relationship between God and the individual, but offers new life, an abundant life, to all God's children. In the closeness of the family conflict is unavoidable and people will be wronged. Forgiveness expressed verbally and non-verbally in the family makes it possible for children to accept the reality of God's forgiveness. It also makes it possible for children to accept themselves as sinners/saints.

- Hope, a part of everyday living

  Christian people can never expect all of life to be "beauty and light." It is realistic to say that Christian faith makes it possible to live in hope regardless of circumstances. Children in Christian families learn to live in hope, in the goodness and power of God, even when the evidence seems to point to the contrary. The joy that flows from Christian hope is reinforced in Lutheran schools. The celebration of Christian hope and joy in the ups and downs of everyday life provides an important model for maturing young children.

2. Parents as Partners in School Operations

Partnership means sharing goals, responsibility, and resources. If a school is to serve parents and their children, parents must be involved in shaping and giving direction to the school's activities and programs. In this way resources can be pooled for maximum benefit.

The following identifies key areas of responsibility:

a. Policy Formation

Parents are usually represented by the board of education where policy is set. Parents often serve on congregational boards and committees that set congregational policy that affects the school.

There is another level of "policy development" in which more parental participation could be encouraged. Policy is often developed by the faculty. Perhaps "policy" is too heavy a word for the many practices that develop in a school, but "practices" quickly become tradition and unwritten policies. Consider involving parents in making decisions about parties, gifts between students, gifts to teachers, early morning school activities, lunchroom decorum, student dress and behavior, homework and grading. Consider how parents can be involved when such "policies" are set or how parents can be "polled" so their opinions can be considered.

b. Curriculum Development

It will require a very deliberate plan to involve parents in curriculum development. The curriculum has traditionally been decided by the principal and staff with some reporting to the board. Many of these decisions are tied closely with the school's philosophy, which parents certainly must support and foster. How parents can influence the curriculum is a challenge to creative school administration. (See E07-Curriculum Planning Guidelines)

c. Classroom Activities

Parents have been involved in classroom activities in various ways. Parents serve as helpers for special occasions (art projects, field trips, etc.), teacher aids, tutors (hearing reading, math facts, memory assignments, etc.), "guest specialists," volunteer instructors of mini-courses and substitutes for teacher breaks or sick leave.

A school should help parents view themselves as partners and feel good about their contribution to the education of children. Involving fathers as well as mothers and involving older persons are important considerations.

Some excellent resources are

- Innovations Notebook, Description #7
  Parents as teacher's aids or tutors

- Innovations Notebook, Descriptions #4, #8, #12, #18
  Parents as "volunteer teachers" on an ongoing basis, mini-courses, or "winterim"

- Innovations Notebook, Description #3
  Training parents for individual instruction

- Innovations Notebook, Description #18
  "Classroom grandparents"

The Innovations Notebook materials are available from:

Board of Parish Education
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
3558 South Jefferson
St. Louis, MO 63118

d. Evaluation

A good school operation requires ongoing evaluation. Each school year should be carefully assessed to determine

- whether the school is fulfilling its mission

- whether goals are being met and plans carried out

- whether changes in direction or emphasis are warranted.

Clearly, parents should be involved. The question is "How?" Several possibilities are

- evaluation surveys sent to all parents

- parent conferences that ask parents for evaluation and suggestions

- interviews with a random sampling

- participation of selected parents on an evaluation committee or team, including day long school visits

The pupils should also be involved in the evaluation process. This will require establishing an atmosphere in which children feel free to express themselves.

e. Volunteer Work in School Operations

There is a great deal of work to be done around a school that could bring parents and other family members into the school. Tasks for parents and other adults include

- secretarial/clerical tasks

- teachers aids in grading papers, recording etc.

- library work

- maintenance of AV equipment

- maintenance of playground

- general maintenance and repair

Volunteering can help people feel needed and worthwhile. The way in which the school asks for volunteers and treats them can enhance self-worth. Some suggestions are

- offer choices so people can choose what is interesting to them

- show how the task contributes to the purpose of the school

- be honest about the time, energy, and skill required

- request services for a set time period

D. THE ROLE OF THE CONGREGATION IN THE PARTNERSHIP

The school is one ministry of the church. However, parents may see the church and school as separate, especially if more than one congregation is involved in the school operation. There is a special role for the congregation in the partnership.

1. Children as part of the congregation

The custom of counting "communicant membership" for many church statistics is a clue to the way children are often overlooked in the church. Pastors and church leaders may be aware that children are part of the congregation and are present at gatherings, but awareness is not enough. Children dare not be ignored. Children should be included when information or opinions are gathered from the congregation. They should be included wherever possible in congregational programs and efforts.

2. Share information with school families

Often families with children in the school have no other connection with the congregation. These families should be added to the church mailing list to receive newsletters and other church mailings. Announcements made through Sunday bulletins or at worship services should also be made through the school so these families are aware of church activities. All families with children enrolled in the school should feel welcome at all church events.

E. A PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

Understanding expectations and clarifying roles are not one-time activities but are ongoing processes. Communication - both ways - between parents and the school must be constant. The responsibility for establishing this communications loop lies primarily with the school.

The following elements are important for a good system of communications between parents and school:

1. An atmosphere of ministry in which mutual support and help is offered in Christ's name.

2. An atmosphere of openness so that all feel free to express opinions and make suggestions.

   a. An "open door" to the principal's office and easy access to teachers.

   b. A policy of "visit the classrooms anytime."

   c. Follow-up on all suggestions and queries.

3. Scheduled points of contact

   a. an enrollment interview in which expectations and commitments are freely discussed

   b. regular contact between teacher and parents *via* parent conferences and home visits

   c. an organization of parents and teachers (see Part III)

   d. a conscious effort to involve parents in decision-making and policy-setting

   e. planned programs, services, activities that involve parents

   f. an invitation for parents to volunteer to help in the school operation

   g. newsletters or other types of "print" communication from school to home

4. Regular evaluations in which parents

   a. re-evaluate the school's purpose and how that is being carried out

   b. discuss and clarify expectations

   c. recommend changes to insure quality Christian education

F. ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Work through the Family Life Committee of the congregation to offer school services to the congregation to make worship more meaningful for children. Through that committee also offer the services of the school to the evangelism and stewardship committees of the congregation. Ask for the help of these committees in educating children about these important ministries.

Activity 2: Enrollment is a good time to lay the groundwork for good home/school relationships. Review enrollment procedures and check for the following:

a. A highly personal approach so that each person feels important and cared for.

b. An opportunity to clarify expectations of parents and to give parents opportunity to express their expectations of the school.

c. The development and expression of a sense of commitment to partnership.

d. The means to gather sufficient information about the family so that the school can serve the child as well as possible. Note: Care must be taken not to violate personal privacy.

Activity 3: Establish an annual review to determine how the school is functioning as Church. Gather information and ideas about improving worship in the school. Consider ideas for celebrating baptism anniversaries, involving children in evangelism, helping children support and minister to one another and the like. Involve children in the evaluating and planning process as much as possible.

Activity 4: Consider setting aside a day on the school calendar as a day of "Celebration of Children in the Church." Either All Saints Day or the close of the school year would be appropriate times. Each classroom could develop projects to demonstrate how they have been or plan to "be the Church." The principal or pastor may visit each classroom and review with the children their experiences of the Church in school. A worship service could climax the celebration including children telling how they experienced support from the Church, witnessed to God's love, etc. The purpose of such a celebration is to pull together and make meaningful the scattered experiences of Church that are a natural part of life in a Lutheran school.

Activity 5: With the curriculum committee review how the curriculum at all grade levels reflects the partner relationship between home and school. Consider how parents can become more involved in the curricular program.

Activity 6: Establish a regular time for evaluating each school year in the light of your school's purpose. Be sure parents are involved in this process. Two possible ways are

a. Opinionnaires to all parents

b. Some parents on "evaluation committee"

Activity 7: Review all school communication to evaluate how the concept of partnership is being communicated. Improve these communications wherever possible. The following is a partial list of communications you may want to review:

a. "Recruitment" materials

b. School policies especially those that relate to enrollment

c. Newsletters

d. Report cards and Reporting Conferences

e. Announcements of school and church activities

PART III ORGANIZED PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL/HOME PARTNERSHIP

One of the important ways for developing home/school partnerships is through organized programs.

1. Parent Teacher Organizations: National Lutheran Parent Teacher League

Many schools have found it helpful to have an organization for parents and teachers that meets regularly to work together to achieve common goals. Some congregations have expanded their school Parent Teacher League to include parents whose children are not in the school but participate in other educational agencies of the church. Therefore, they share a common interest in Christian education. Educational experiences at meetings provide an opportunity for parents and teachers to learn together.

The purpose of a parent teacher organization is two-fold:

a. To provide opportunities for growth and learning for parents and teachers around topics of mutual interest especially the Christian nurture and development of children and families

b. To develop a sense of community and Christian fellowship for mutual support and enjoyment

The National Lutheran Parent Teacher League (NLPTL) is a pan-Lutheran organization that local groups may join. The national organization provides helps for organizing in addition to a variety of program materials. There is an annual convention of the national body and there are frequent regional or local conferences or seminars. Joining the NLPTL is a good way for a local group to get helpful resources. For information write

The National Lutheran Parent Teacher League
3558 South Jefferson
St. Louis, MO 63118

2. Effectiveness Training for Lutherans

Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) is a program of Effectiveness Training Associates of Lolona Beach, California. The program has been adapted as a program of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church under the title Effectiveness Training for Lutherans. ETL has offices in St. Louis, Missouri, and has trained Parent Effectiveness Training leaders scattered all over the country. Parent Effectiveness Training is designed to help parents communicate more effectively with their children by improving their skills of listening and self-expression. The PET program consists of eight sessions, generally held one evening a week.

Schools and congregations interested may contact the local district office of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod or of the American Lutheran Church. An alternative, expecially for Lutherans of other synods, is to contact the ETL office directly. Write or call

Effectiveness Training for Lutherans
3558 South Jefferson
St. Louis, MO 63118
(314) 664-7000

CONCLUSION

The school and the home need each other. The Lutheran school will have to accept the responsibility for developing and maintaining a partnership. Because parents and the school share a common interest in the child's development, both must freely share their resources to nurture the partnership.

Partnership begins by sensing the possibilities which come from working together and sharing resources and skills A free flow of communications, sharing of expectations, and an honest expression of evaluation will make the partnership dynamic to the glory of God as school children are educated in His name.

PLANNING FOR LUTHERAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

E01	WHY THE LUTHERAN SCHOOL	Rev. Paul Pallmeyer Minneapolis, Minnesota
E02	GUIDELINES FOR STARTING A NEW SCHOOL	Mr. Neal Meitler Dr. Martin Wessler Milwaukee, Wisconsin
E03	BOARD OF EDUCATION HANDBOOK	Dr. Glenn Bracht Waverly, Iowa
E04	PERSONNEL HANDBOOK	Mr. Kenneth Markworth Waverly, Iowa
E05	RECRUITMENT/PUBLIC RELATIONS/TRANSPORTATION HANDBOOK	Mr. Richard Sauer Ft. Wayne, Indiana
E06	LEGAL REQUIREMENTS	Mr. Wilbur Tewes Appleton, Wisconsin
E07	CURRICULUM PLANNING GUIDELINES	Dr. Glenn Kraft Seward, Nebraska
E08	FINANCIAL PLANNING AND ACCOUNTING HANDBOOK	Mr. Neal Meitler Milwaukee, Wisconsin
E09	FUNDING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS	Mr. Neal Meitler Dr. Martin Wessler Milwaukee, Wisconsin
E10	BUILDING AND EQUIPMENT PLANNING	Mr. Robert Eggold Topeka, Kansas
E11	THE ROLE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN CHANGING COMMUNITIES	Mr. Donald Kell Ann Arbor, Michigan
E12	PARENTS AS PARTNERS	Mr. Eldor Kaiser Appleton, Wisconsin
E13	MODEL LUTHERAN SCHOOLS	Mr. Ellsworth Kierbs Seward, Nebraska

The above materials can be ordered from:

Board of Parish Education
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
3558 South Jefferson Avenue
St. Louis, Missouri 63118

or

The American Lutheran Church
Mr. Don Vetter
Wartburg College
Waverly, Iowa 50677

The most effective agencies available to the Church for equipping God's people for ministry are the Lutheran elementary and secondary schools.

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